

National Certification: Moving Forward for Professional Health Care Interpreters

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For nearly as long as the healthcare interpreting community has been pursuing the idea of certification for medical interpreters, Pacific Interpreters has endorsed the concept and supported the organizations driving that pursuit. A national certification program could benefit interpreters in a number of ways, including 1) Increased recognition of their unique skills and abilities, 2) Pay commensurate with their training and qualifications, 3) Acceptance as professionals integral to the health care team, 4) Adherence to the professional code of ethics, and 5) Meeting a set of criteria to ensure quality of services that is acceptable to accreditation organizations such as The Joint Commission and the National Committee on Quality Assurance (NCQA).

Interpreting organizations such as the National Council for Interpreters in Health Care (NCIHC), the International Medical Interpreters Association, the California Health Interpreters Association (CHIA), the Medical Interpreters of Georgia (MING), the Texas Association of Health interpreters and Translators (TAHIT) and others are among the groups whose efforts Pacific has and does support in advancing the medical interpreting field. We have provided these organizations with financial support, in-kind goods and services, or direct participation. It is our belief that efforts undertaken to professionalize the quality of healthcare interpreting serves to benefit not only interpreters, but even more importantly, the LEP patients and providers they serve. To this end, our company support has been broad-based and as non-partisan as possible.

Recently, the movement to create certification for medical interpreters has split into two distinct paths: One, now represented by CCHI (the Commission for Certification of Healthcare Interpreters) is actively developing its own testing and certification program. Pacific Interpreters is committed to supporting the efforts of CCHI in creating a creditable certification for medical interpreters and we provide meaningful financial support to that body.

The other, initiated through the joint efforts of IMIA and Language Line Services, continues to move forward, now as an independent body, the NBCMI (National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters.) While there has been some degree of controversy over the initial development of this initiative, it is widely supported by a base of working interpreters and organizations, and now, as a fully independent Board, has the potential to move forward and complete the certification process initiated by its founders.

In March 2010 the NBCMI asked if Pacific Interpreters would provide a candidate to fill a vacancy on its Board. It was our considered opinion that telephone interpreting (our core business) was well represented in the CCHI initiative through support and participation of several fellow telephone interpreting companies, while the NBCMI board had only one telephone interpreting company represented: Language Line. Since a great many interpreters will seek certification through the NBCMI channel and we believe that our representation in this effort is in accord with our corporate responsibility as a national provider of interpreting services. We therefore agreed to offer a candidate to fill the position, to offer what guidance we believe we can.

The decision to support both certification efforts reflects on our belief that it is critical for LEP patients, providers and interpreters that we all participate in as supportive and non-divisive a way as possible to provide best healthcare outcomes for LEP patients. Thus our broad involvement with the medical interpreting community serves what we believe is the best interest of medical interpreters, the patients and providers they serve, and not incidentally, our company.

We encourage interpreters to join their local interpreting organizations in their city and state/region. A number of channels exist for interpreters to drive the effort forward toward national certification. I have included the website addresses for a number of organizations that are articulating the issues most salient for interpreters. In the coming months, Pacific Interpreters will be featuring a number of issues in the newsletter that are worth discussing related to certification, training, testing and industry standards.

1. **Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)**
The Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI) was launched in September 2009 as an independent certification agency and 501(c)(6) organization in compliance with requirements of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for certification commissions.
<http://www.healthcareinterpretercertification.org>
2. **The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC).** NCIHC is a multidisciplinary organization based in the United States whose mission is to promote culturally competent professional health care interpreting as a means to support equal access to health care for individuals with limited English proficiency.
<http://www.ncihc.org>
3. **The International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA)** is an international trade association committed to the advancement of professional medical interpreters as the best practice to equitable language access to health care for linguistically diverse patients.
<http://www.imiaweb.org>
4. **The National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters**
1425 K Street NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
Email: info@certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org
5. **The California Health Interpreters Association (CHIA)** mission is to: Increase equal access to healthcare by developing and promoting the healthcare interpreter profession, advocating for culturally and linguistically appropriate services and providing education and training to healthcare professionals.
<http://www.interpreterschia.org>
6. **The Texas Association of Healthcare Interpreters and Translators (TAHIT)** is a 501(c)(6) non-profit association whose mission is to promote language access within healthcare by facilitating training, education, and communication between government, provider, and individual stakeholders. <http://www.tahit.us/>
7. **The Nebraska of Translators and Interpreters (NATI)** exists to inform, train, and assist those involved in the translation and interpretation industries. We keep our members informed of new developments, upcoming events and seminars of interest, legislation pertaining to the industry, timely articles and papers, employment opportunities; in short, anything that may be of benefit to our members, we want them to know about it.
<http://www.natihq.org>
8. **The Medical Interpreter Network of Georgia (MING),** is a non-profit organization, founded in 1999, whose membership includes medical interpreters as well as other institutions who support MING's mission to promote equal access to health care services for Limited English Proficient individuals by supporting professional medical interpretation, and by serving as a resource for medical interpreters and providers in Georgia.
<http://www.mingweb.org>

Please feel free to provide your comments and questions to pinewsletter@pacificinterpreters.com.